

# Governor's World Language Expansion Program Receives Plaudits after First Year

*Number of schools and students involved in Chinese or Spanish Immersion expected to more than double in coming school year*

Newark, DE – A review of Governor Jack Markell's world language immersion initiative, which seeks to give Delaware students an advantage in the global economy by ensuring their proficiency in a second language, showed that parents and a third party evaluator gave the effort high marks for its first year.

The Governor spoke about the results of the initiative's initial classes and looked forward to the program's growth when he visited the Chinese Immersion Summer Camp at John R. Downes Elementary School in Newark today. Downes will launch one of the state's six new immersion programs that are scheduled to begin in the 2013-14 school year. The other five schools will run Spanish programs.

In 2012-13, 340 Delaware students in either kindergarten or first grade began the immersion process in four programs: two in Mandarin Chinese and two in Spanish. The Chinese students began at McIlvaine Early Childhood Center in Magnolia and will move on to either Frear or Simpson Elementary Schools in the Caesar Rodney School District. The Spanish classes took place at William C. Lewis Dual Language Elementary School in Wilmington and John M. Clayton Elementary School in Frankford.

"All the evidence we have gathered in year one of the implementation of this program is that these classrooms are excellent places for children to learn and feel good about themselves and what they are learning," wrote independent world language consultant Ann Tollefson in a report given to

the Delaware Department of Education recapping the school year.

“The fall and spring survey results were extremely positive in all three Cohort 1 schools. Parents, children, and program staff are pleased with the program and believe that children are learning successfully while developing a natural proficiency in another language, both of which were verified by classroom observations.”

Beginning in kindergarten, students learn their elementary math, science, and social studies the second language, with full immersion continuing through fifth grade. By 4th grade, students are expected to be proficient enough to travel with their families in China or a Spanish-speaking country. In middle school, they will take honors language classes and complete school projects with peers in other countries. By 9th grade, they’ll be able to take and pass the Advanced Placement language and culture class.

In surveys, all of the students’ parents agreed that the program enriched their child’s education and nearly all said both that their child enjoys learning the language and talks about the program at home.

“I’m frequently inspired by Delaware’s youth, and spending any amount of time with our young students in their world language immersion classes affirms their limitless potential,” said Markell.

“We have the chance to provide our kids an edge in a multilingual and multicultural workforce and meet our need to build a talent base in Delaware that will compete, lead and win on a global stage – where billions of potential customers do not speak English fluently. If we are successful, our schools will graduate student ready for jobs with global companies, and we will attract businesses to base their job growth in Delaware.”

Markell announced that more than 800 kindergarten and elementary school students would participate in the 2013-2014 school year and that his Administration would examine interest and demand for offering more languages. As a separate part of the initiative, more than 250 middle school students took an innovative Chinese or Spanish course last year and that number is expected to grow to more than 500 this fall.

Research shows that immersion students perform as well or better than their non-immersion peers on standardized tests of English and mathematics, even when these assessments are delivered in English. They develop greater cognitive flexibility, increased attention control, better memory and superior problem-solving skills, while acquiring an appreciation for different cultural perspectives and practices.

“In addition to these advantages, our first year of implementation showed that language immersion creates excitement about education among parents, teachers and, most importantly, students,” said Markell.